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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION: INDICTMENT OF KMT CHAIRMAN MA YING-JEOU

¶1. Summary: The Taiwan dailies gave significant reporting and editorial coverage February 14 on the indictment of KMT Chairman Ma Ying-jeou, who announced Tuesday evening his decision to resign from the party chairmanship but run in the 2008 presidential election. The pro-unification "United Daily News" front-paged the results of its latest survey, which showed that 66 percent of those polled said they support Ma to run in the 2008 presidential election and 47 percent said they are dissatisfied with the prosecutors' decision to indict Ma. The same poll also found that Ma's approval rating rose to 62 percent, a 10-percent increase compared with a poll conducted in November, when Ma donated part of his special funds to charity. The pro-status quo "China Times" also carried the results of its survey on page five, which showed that 54.7 percent of respondents said they believe Ma should run for president in 2008, and 45.9 percent said they believe that Ma is clean. The same poll also showed that 74.6 percent of respondents said they believe that prosecutors should use the same standard to examine the use of special funds by the DPP's four bigwigs.

¶2. In terms of editorials and commentaries, an editorial in the pro-independence "Liberty Times," Taiwan's largest-circulation daily, said the KMT should not have revised and tailor-made its party regulations just to allow Ma to run in the presidential election. Editorials in the limited-circulation, pro-independence, English-language "Taipei Times" and "Taiwan News" both said the KMT's revision of its party regulations for Ma's sake will undermine Ma's political credibility. An editorial in the mass-circulation "Apple Daily," on the other hand, said it is happy to see Ma bravely announce his decision to run for president. Editorials in the pro-status quo "China Times" and the pro-unification "United Daily News" both urged the prosecutors to use the same criteria to investigate the use of special funds by the Green camp bigwigs. An editorial in the limited-circulation, conservative, pro-unification, English-language "China Post" urged the KMT to stay united to weather the political storm caused by Ma's indictment. End summary.

A) "Ma Called on Bian to Step down when Bian's Wife Was Indicted, But Ma Wants to Run for President After Being Indicted"

The pro-independence "Liberty Times" [circulation: 550,000] editorialized (2/14):

"... The KMT does not belong to Ma Ying-jeou alone. The KMT often claims that it has a wealth of talents; should this be the case, it should not have broken its original party regulations just for Ma Ying-jeou. Now that the [KMT's] black-gold [illicit funds] clause has been revised and tailor-made to suit a certain person, it is akin to wiping out the spirit of a democratic party. ..."

B) "Ma's Bid against the Spirit of Law"

The pro-independence, English-language "Taipei Times" [circulation:

30,000] editorialized (2/14):

"... All of these [KMT] groups are actually helping to damage Ma's political credibility. With party regulations changing so that Ma can become the KMT's presidential candidate, voters will question his integrity. ... The campaign to depose Chen called for integrity, but now the pan-blue camp does not want to abide by these principles. If Ma proceeds with this course of action, it will not only mar his reputation, but also make it impossible for the KMT to talk about rules of any nature with credibility. ... The pan-blue camp may be willing to turn a blind eye to Ma's indictment, but the public may not be as charitable."

C) "People Must Judge Ma's Announcement"

The pro-independence, English-language "Taiwan News" [circulation: 20,000] editorialized (2/14):

"... Whether Ma is innocent or guilty of the charges of corruption against him is a matter for the court to decide, but the KMT chairman's decision to announce his resolve 'not to be beaten down' and to run for the presidency in the wake of being indicted for 'corruption' are profoundly political actions that will test the wisdom of our 23 million people. ... Although Ma's announcement may partially counteract the negative media impact of his indictment today, we believe that his action sets a shockingly evil precedent and undermines any possible claim to political integrity. ... The KMT and its leader have announced to the people of Taiwan that they have no intention whatsoever of abandoning their party's deeply ingrained culture of institutional corruption. ..."

D) "Right and Wrong of Ma Ying-jeou"

The mass-circulation "Apple Daily" [circulation: 550,000] wrote in an editorial (2/14):

"... We are happy to see the highly popular Ma Ying-jeou bravely state his determination to run for president. It is also because of the high expectations of [Taiwan] society, Ma has the responsibility to create a paragon for Taiwan. No matter whether he wins or loses in the future, we all hope that Ma and his rivals will engage in campaigns that are both respectable and of high quality."

E) "We Are Waiting to See How the Prosecutors Probe and Decide on the [Cases of the] Green Bigwigs"

The pro-status quo "China Times" [circulation: 400,000] editorialized (2/14):

"... If [Ma's case] spells out the criteria that the prosecutors are going to use when investigating other cases involving the allowances of high-ranking government officials, the entire island will watch with eyes wide open how the prosecutors handle the allowance cases of Judicial Yuan President Weng Yueh-sheng and of the Green bigwigs such as Annette Lu, Yu Shyi-kun, Su Tseng-chang, and Frank Hsieh. ... Just like the political upheavals generated by [Chen Shui-bian's] state affairs allowance case, Ma Ying-jeou's mayoral allowance case will definitely trigger another round of political turmoil. For the Blue and Green bigwigs who are about to vie for the presidency in 2008, the turmoil will be a variable that no one can overlook. But we would rather choose to believe that, for the prosecutors, there is no distinction of Blue or Green in their mind; nor should political factors affect the investigation or judgment of the prosecutors. Even though over half the public in Taiwan found it hard to believe or even accept Ma's indictment, they have no choice but to respect the current judicial decision. We are waiting to see how the prosecutors are going to deal with the allowance cases of other government officials, including those of the Green bigwigs and Judicial Yuan Weng Yueh-sheng."

F) "Asymmetrical Judicial Outcomes: the State Affairs Allowance [Case] Fails to Fetter Chen Shui-bian, But the Mayoral Allowance [Case] Has Bridled Ma Ying-jeou"

The pro-unification "United Daily News" [circulation: 400,000] commented in an editorial (2/14):

"... Judging from the investigation process, we can hardly say that

this case carries any intent of 'judicial persecution;' nor do we believe that the prosecutors have been manipulated by any political power. But even so, we still don't believe that the prosecutors have handled [Ma's] case in the most appropriate way. ... The prosecutors may have different interpretations with regard to the nature of allowances for high-ranking government officials, but they determined that Ma is 'corrupt' based on the allowance requesting procedures specified by the Taipei City Council. If this criterion is not applied to all other political officeholders, [the prosecutors'] judgment will surely be strongly challenged in future trials. ...

"The DPP is, without a doubt, the one that most benefits from Ma's indictment. The DPP camp members' happy and excited faces say it all. Judging by the current situation, not only has the Presidential Office's allowance for state affairs case failed to fetter incumbent President Chen Shui-bian, but the mayoral allowance case has bridled Ma, the KMT hopeful who is most likely to secure a victory in the 2008 presidential election. Given such a sudden and major change in the situation, one can say that the situation now bodes well for the DPP to win the 2008 elections. ..."

G) "KMT Must Remain United to Weather Political Storm"

The conservative, pro-unification, English-language "China Post" [circulation: 30,000] editorialized (2/14):

"... The indictment decision did not come as too much of a surprise, but both Premier Su Tseng-chang and President Chen Shui-bian have stressed the case should be vigorously pursued. The prosecutor was working under extreme pressure. He probably had no choice. ... At any rate, the indictment has dealt a blow to the KMT, which has been striving to regain power after losing two presidential elections in a row. Ma, a political star with enormous popularity until recently, had been widely expected to win the 2008 presidential election because of his high approval ratings. ... However, the KMT will certainly lose again if it continues to be troubled by disharmony and disunity. Intraparty harmony can be maintained if the competition between Ma and Wang is resolved in a fair and democratic way."

YOUNG